

On this first occasion the closest I could get to the event was the office of Vice-Admiral G. Zolotukhin, head of one of the naval administrations. Also present besides my host, was a group of specialists who had prepared the test. For it was here that all of the data were to come in concerning events on the Novaya Zemlya nuclear testing range. In the period before "zero hour" my new acquaintances were not particularly talkative.

It's easy to understand why: their attention is focused on that deep, tightly sealed shaft under the mountain where "the product" is now resting quietly; on the numerous instruments of the "Splav" automatic system surrounding it which are supposed to give the experimenters information on pressure, radiation, direction of air current, and other results of the blast; and on the external remote automated radiation monitoring system known as "Tunets" (tunny-fish). And, of course, on their comrades - the theoretical physicists, the people who designed "the product", and the range personnel - who are now on Novaya Zemlya. With the approach of "zero hour" helicopters lift lightly off the ground and ships are on full alert; for if anything happens the people must be evacuated immediately. A weapon is a weapon, and an experimental one all the more so. And it has already been in the shaft a long time for various reasons, including waiting for the weather at sea. The wind must carry a radioactive cloud out to sea if it should suddenly develop.

"Silence," says the admiral. "Fire!"

And after several minutes have elapsed we hear the report:

"Test successful. Initial data indicate situation normal."

The admiral now busies himself with reports to "topside". People are telling me that on the testing range they are examining data from numerous sensors, that helicopters are circling above the mountain measuring atmospheric parameters, and, above them, a specially equipped aircraft is doing the same thing.